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Coming of Age:

A New Afrikan Revolutionary



by Safiya Asya Bukhari

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of Producer Safiya Bukhari

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decision to follow the example set by all those now active in the Movement who, along with Sister Safiya and all other Political/Prisoners of War, are totally committed to carrying on the New Afrikan tradition of resistance, and who stand as beacons on the hill, shining light on the path that the New Afrikan nation must take as it comes of age, and makes revolution.

From one generation to the next,

**Build To Win The War
For Independence and Socialism
Free All Political/Prisoners of War
Free The Land
All Power To The People**



Producer Safiya Bukhari

wrote prolifically about individual cases, designed and made political prisoner T-shirts, buttons, bumper stickers, and mouse pads, wrote fact sheets on each individual case and in 1992 co-founded the New York Free Mumia Abu-Jamal Coalition which she co-chaired until her death. She also served as Vice President in the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, an organization working towards the formation of a separate Black nation comprised of five states — South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, states built on the backs of enslaved Africans.

In 1998, Safiya became the co-chair of the Jericho Movement to Free U.S. Political Prisoners and Prisoners of War. She established a website and traveled throughout the country organizing people to the cause of those behind the walls. Coming from a strong family spiritual tradition, Safiya came to embrace Islam.

Safiya Asya Bukhari, Revolutionary, Mother, Grandmother, singer, writer, comrade, sister and friend, our loss reverberates throughout the ages.

We Mourn the Loss of

Dedicated, nationally known Black liberation fighter and longtime WBAI producer Safiya Bukhari (*Where We Live*, Thursdays, 8-9 pm) died in the early hours of the morning from complications due to prolonged illness. She was 53. Safiya joined the Black Panther Party in 1969 after witnessing a vicious police beating of another Panther standing on a Harlem street corner selling the Party's newspaper. "I tell people straight up that it was the New York Police Department that made me decide to join the Black Panther Party." She said, "In college I supported the war in Vietnam. I was so far to the right it was ridiculous. But by the time the summer of 1969 was over, in November, I was in the Party."

A disciplined and dedicated revolutionary, Safiya went on to join the Black Liberation Army. She spent close to nine years in prison for clandestine actions on behalf of the BLA. After her release, Safiya dedicated her life to the freedom of her comrades she left behind, and used every means at her disposal. She

by Sally O'Brien, co-producer, co-host, *Where We Live*
August 24th, 2003

COMING OF AGE: A NEW AFRIKAN REVOLUTIONARY

by Safiya Asya Bukhari

Greek mythology tells the story of Minos, ruler of the city of Knossos. Minos has a great labyrinth (maze) in which he keeps the Minotaur, a monster half man and half bull, whose victims were boys and girls who would make it to the center of the maze and be killed when they came face to face with the Minotaur. If an intended victim chanced to survive the encounter with the Minotaur, they perished trying to find their way out of the many intricate passages. Finally, Theseus of Athens, with the help of Ariadne, Minos' daughter, enters the labyrinth, slays the beast, and finds his way out by following the thread he had unwound as he entered.

The maturation process is full of obstacles and entanglements for anyone, but for a New Afrikan woman in amerikkka, it has all the markings of the Minotaur's Maze. I had to say that, even though nothing as spectacular takes place in the maturation process of the average New Afrikan woman — it didn't ever happen to me — but the day-to-day struggle for survival and growth reaps the same reward in the end in ten thousand different ways. The trick is to learn from each defeat, and become stronger and more determined... think and begin to develop the necessary strategies to insure the annihilation of the beast...

I am one of a family of 10 children. My parents were strict and religious, but proud and independent. One of the strongest influences of my childhood was my mother constantly telling us to hold our heads up and be proud because we were just as good or better than everyone else, and to stand up and fight for what you believe to be right.

This essay first appeared in *Notes from a New Afrikan P.O.W. Journal*, Book 7 (Spear & Shield Publications, 1979).

There was a lot of competition in my family; had to be, with 10 children (all two years apart) growing up, each trying to live up to the other or be better. We were determined not to be caught up in the rut of the ghetto. We were going to get out... so each of us worked on our separate goals — ten *individuals* — one family, in our separate world.

We believed that with the right education We could “make it” — so that’s the route We took searching for the “amerikkkan dream.” i was going to be a doctor.

In my second year of college i pledged for a sorority — it was here that the rose-colored glasses were cracked and rays of reality were allowed to filter in.

The sorority had decided to help “disadvantaged” children as one of our projects for the year and were trying to decide what country to work with, when one of the Sisters suggested that We work in the ghettos of New York. Personally, i’d never even thought of people in the united states being disadvantaged, but only too lazy to work and “make it.” i was in for one of the biggest rude awakenings of my life.

A few of us were sent to Harlem to investigate the situation. We talked to people on the street, in the welfare centers, from door to door, and watched them work and play, loiter on the corners and in the bars. What We came away with was a story of humiliation, degradation, deprivation and waste, that started in infancy and lasted until death... in too many cases, at an early age.

Even at this point, i didn’t see this as affecting me personally, only as a sorority project... sort of a tourist who takes pity on the less fortunate. The sorority decided to do what We could to help the children. The Black Panther Party had a Free Breakfast Program to feed the children going on. i had a daughter of my own at this point, and decided that i would put my energies into this.

i couldn’t get into the politics of the Black Panther Party, but i could volunteer to feed some hungry children; you see, children deserve a start

Coming of Age: An Update (1981)

It’s two years since i wrote the original article... lots of things have happened... Assata Shakur was liberated; Imari Obadele was released... the Ku Klux Klan regrouped and revamped; 16 black children are missing and presumed to be dead in Atlanta; 8 black men murdered in Buffalo; pregnant black women shot in Chattanooga; Ronald Reagan will take office in 2 days.

It’s two months since i was released from the Maximum Security Building... had to go to kourt to do it... it too was an eye opening experience... they said the reason they were keeping me housed in that building was because i was a “threat to the security of the free world.”

What can i say? It seems that the political scene in amerikkka has come full circle, and black people are once again the scapegoats for everything that goes wrong in white amerikkka. They no longer feel the need to pacify us with poverty programs and token jobs.

Sitting in a Maximum Security cell for 3 years and 7 months afforded me an opportunity to reflect upon my life and the lessons i was forced to learn... but now the learning process is over... it is time to put what i’ve learned into practice... freedom will only be won by the sweat of our brows.

victimized by the police and other agents of the government. They were frightened of the potential to wreak havoc that black women represented when black women began to enter into the prisons and jails in efforts to liberate their men. They were spurred into action when they were confronted with the fact that black women were educating their children from the cradle up, who the real enemies of black people are, and what must be done to eliminate this ever-present threat to the lives of black people.

During the last four years of my incarceration i've watched and didn't speak because i didn't want to chance alienating the "left," as black men and black women have fooled themselves into believing that We were "making progress" because (1) Patricia Harris, a black woman, is part of the u.s. president's cabinet, and (2) Andrew Young is the ambassador to the UN — failing to realize that it's all politics — amerikkkan style. And, twenty women of all races are working together for Women's Liberation. There is no real progress being made. As a matter of fact, one of Carter's best friends, Vernon Jordan, had to concede in his annual economic review, the State of Black Amerikkka, 1979, that "the income gap between blacks and whites is actually widening."

The sacrifices black women have made in search of black womanhood, like the sacrifices made by the people of Knossos in its efforts to slay the Minotaur, have been many, harsh and cruel — but We too can slay the beast (in our case, amerikkkan racism, capitalism, and sexism), and out of the ashes build a free and independent Black Nation in which We can take our rightful place as Women, Wives, and Mothers, knowing our children will live to be men and women, and our men will be allowed to recognize their manhood — support and defend their families with dignity.

TOGETHER BUILDING A FUTURE FOR OURSELVES!

Build To Win!

and you have to feed them for them to live to learn. It's hard to think of reading and arithmetic when your stomach's growling.

i'm not trying to tell the logic of why a Free Breakfast Program for children, but to show how i had to be slowly awakened into the reality of life and shown the inter-connection of things.

Every morning at 5:00 my daughter and i would get ready and go to the Center where i was working on the Breakfast Program — cook and serve breakfast, sometimes talk to the children about problems they were encountering and sometimes help them with their homework. Everything was going along smoothly until the number of children coming began to fall off. Finally, i began to question the children and found out that the police had been telling the parents in the neighborhood not to send their children to the Program because We were feeding them poisoned food.

It's one thing to hear about underhanded things the police do — you can ignore it then — but it's totally different when you experience it for yourself — you either lie to yourself or face it. i chose to face it and find out why the police felt it was so important to keep New Afrikan children from being fed that they told lies. i went back to the Black Panther Party and started attending some of their Community Political Education Classes.

It wasn't long after that when i was forced to make a decision about what direction i was going in politically, i was on 42nd street with a friend when we noticed a crowd gathered on the corner. In the center of the crowd was a Panther with some newspapers under his arm. Two police officers were also there, i listened to see what was going on. The police were telling the Panther he couldn't sell newspapers on the corner and he was insisting that he could. Without a thought, i told the police that the Brother had a "constitutional right" to disseminate political literature anywhere, at which point the police asked for my identification and arrested the Sister and myself, along with the Brother who was selling the papers.

First Encounter With The Police

i had never been arrested before, and i was naive enough to believe that all you had to do was be honest and everything would work out all right. i was wrong again. As soon as the police got us into the back-seat of their car and pulled away from the crowd, the beastiality began to show. My friend went to say something and one of the police officers threatened to ram his nightstick up her if she opened her mouth again, and ran on in a monologue about New Afrikan (black) people. i listened and got angry...

At the 14th Precinct they separated us to search us. After the policewoman had searched me, i remember one of the male officers telling her to make sure she washed her hand so she wouldn't catch anything.

That night, i went to see my mother, explained to her about the bust and about a decision i'd made. Momma and Daddy were in the kitchen when i got there — Daddy sitting at the table and Momma cooking. i remember telling them about the bust and them saying nothing. Then i told them about how the police had acted and them still saying nothing. Then i told them that i couldn't sit still and allow the police to get away with that. i had to stand up for my rights as a human being. i remember my mother saying, "...if you think it's right, then do it." i went back to Harlem and joined the Black Panther Party.

i spent the next year working with welfare mothers. Liberation Schools, talking to students, learning the reality of life in the ghettos of amerikkka and re-evaluating a lot of the things i had been taught about the "land of the free and home of the brave."

It was about this time that i quit school and went to look for a full-time job. i had education and skills but there was always something wrong. It didn't dawn on me what it was until i went to ITT and applied for a job as a receptionist-clerk, and they told me i was *over qualified*, i ended up working for my friend's mother in her beauty parlor and spent all my spare time with the Party.

i finally got to the hospital in June of 1978. By that time it was too late. i was so messed up inside that everything but one ovary had to go, because of the negligence of the "doctor" and lack of feeling of the prison officials (they didn't give a damn), i was forced to have a hysterectomy.

When they brought me back to this prison in March of 1977 because of the escape, they placed me in Cell 5 on the segregation end of the Maximum Security Building — the same room they placed me in on April 17, 1975. To date, i'm still in that cell, allegedly because of my escape, but in actuality because of my politics.

How do i know? Because since my being returned to this institution on March 24, 1977, other women have escaped and been brought back and have been released to general population — and yesterday my co-defendant on the escape charge was okayed for release to general population. i was denied.

Despite all of the emotional and physical setbacks i've experienced, i've learned a lot. i've watched the oppressor play that same old game on black people they've been playing for centuries — divide and conquer. Black women break under the pressure and sell their men down the river and then separate them from their children. In two strokes they do more damage than 30 years in prison could have done if the women had supported their men.

And now, more than ever before, black women — New Afrikan women — have developed a mercenary outlook on life. They are not about Family, Community, and us as a People anymore. They're about looking good, having fun and "making it." Women's liberation is what they're about, failing to grasp the realization that true women's liberation for black women will only come about with the liberation of black people as a whole, so that for the first time since our forefathers were snatched from the Afrikan continent and brought to amerikkka as slave labor. We can have a Family, and from that Family build a Community and a Nation.

The powers that be were totally disconcerted when black mothers, wives, daughters and black women in general, stood by and in a lot of cases, fought beside their men, when they were captured, shot or

Trial and Imprisonment

On April 16, 1975, after a trial that lasted one day, We were sentenced to 40 years, and on April 17, i arrived here at the Virginia Correctional Center for Women at Goochland.

Directly following my arrival i was placed in the Max Security Building and there i stayed, until after being threatened with kourt action, they released me to general population. The day after my release to general population i was told that the first iota of trouble that i caused i would be placed back in the Max Security Building and there i'd stay.

At that point and for the next two years, my emphasis was on getting some medical care for myself and the other women here and educational programs and activities; the priority being on medical care for myself. Inside the prison i was denied it (the general feeling was they couldn't chance hospitalization for fear i'd escape; so rather than chancing my escape, they preferred to take a chance on my life). In the kourts they said they saw no evidence of inadequate medical care, but rather a difference of opinion on treatment between me and the prison doctor.

The "medical treatment" for women prisoners here in Virginia has got to be an all-time low, when you got to put your life in the hands of a "doctor" who examines a woman who has her right ovary removed and tells her there's tenderness in her right ovary; or when this same "doctor" examines a woman who has been in prison for six months and tells her she's six weeks pregnant, and there's nothing wrong with her, and she later finds her baby has died and mortified inside her; or when he tells you you're not pregnant and three months later you give birth to a seven pound baby boy; not to mention prescribing Maalox for a sore throat and diagnosing a sore throat that turns out to be cancer.

In December of 1976 i started hemorrhaging and went to the clinic for help. No help of any consequence was given, so i escaped. Two months later i was recaptured. While on escape i was told by a doctor that i could either endure the situation, take pain killers, or have surgery. i decided to use the lack of medical care as my defense for the escape and by doing so do two things: (1) expose the level of medical care at the prison and (2) put pressure on them to give me the care i needed.

By the summer of 1970 i was a full-time Party member and my daughter was staying with my mother. i was teaching some of the Political Education classes at the Party office, and had established a Liberation School in my Section of the community. i had listened to the elderly while they told me how they couldn't survive off their miserly Social Security checks — not pay rent and eat, too — so they pay their rent and eat from the dog food section of the supermarket or the garbage cans. i had listened to the middle-aged mother as she told of being evicted from her home and sleeping on a subway with her children because the welfare refused to give her help unless she signed over all the property she had, and out of desperation, fraudulently received welfare. i had watched while a mother prostituted her body to put food in the mouth of her child and another mother, mentally broken under the pressure, prostituted her eight year old child. i had seen enough of the ravages of dope, alcohol, and despair to know that a change had to be made so the world could be a better place for my child to live in.

My mother had successfully kept me ignorant to the reality of the plight of New Afrikan (black) people in amerikkka — now i had learned it for myself — but i was still to learn a harsher lesson: the plight of the slave who dares to rebel.

Turbulent Times

The year 1971 saw many turbulent times in the Black Panther Party, and changes in my life. i met and worked with many people who were to teach me and guide me: Michael (Cetewayo) Tabor of the Panther 21; Albert (Nuh) Washington, and "Lost One," who was responsible for my initial political education; Robert Webb. Cet taught me to deal principledly; Nuh taught me compassion; and Robert taught me to be firm in my convictions.

When the split went down in the Black Panther Party, i was left in a position of Communications and Information Officer for the East Coast Party. It wasn't until much later that i was to find out how vulnerable that position was.

Many of the members of the Party went underground to work with the Black Liberation Army (BLA). i was among those who elected to remain aboveground and supply necessary support. The murders of youths such as Clifford Glover, Tyrone Guyton, etc., by the police, and retaliation by the BLA with the assassination of pigs Piagentini and Jones and Rocco and Laurie, made the powers that be frantic, and they pulled out the stops in their campaign to rid the streets of rebellious slaves.

By the spring of 1973, Comrades Assata Shakur and Sundiata Acoli were captured, along with Nuh and Jalil (Anthony Bottoms), and Twyman Myers was on the f.b.i.'s 10 Most Wanted list, and i was still traveling back and forth across the kountry trying to build necessary support mechanisms.

In 1972 i recognized the need for something other than myself to depend on. You see, in less than two years i'd aged to the point where i realized that nothing is permanent or secure in a world where it's who you know and what you have that counts. i'd seen friends and loved ones either killed or thrown in prison, and associates that i'd once thought would never go back, turn states or go back into the woodwork. Nuh turned me on to Islam, which gave me a new security, sense of purpose, and dignity.

By 1973 i'd begun to receive a lot of flak from the police because of what they "suspected" i might be doing. Actually it was because i didn't have a record; they couldn't catch me doing anything, and i continued to actively and vocally support the BLA members... also my homework had been done so well in the community, that the community's support was there, also.

Following the receipt of subpoenas to appear before a special grand jury investigating the BLA that was seated in New York in the spring of 1974, i went underground along with some other people, to function with the BLA.

On January 25, 1975, myself and some other members of the Amistad Collective of the BLA, went into the country in Virginia to practice night firing. We were to leave Virginia that night on our way to Jackson,

Mississippi, cause i wanted to be there on Sunday to see someone. We decided to stop by a store before We went back to the crib We were staying at, so We could pick up some cold cuts to make sandwiches with so We wouldn't have to stop at any restaurants. We drove around looking for an open store. When We came on to one i told the Brothers to wait in the car and i'd go and be right back.

i entered the store, went past the registers, down an aisle to the meat counter and started checking them for all-beef products, i heard a door opening and looked up to see two of the Brothers coming in — didn't give it a thought — went back to what i was doing when out of the corner of my left eye i saw a rifle pointed toward the door in the manager's hand. i quickly got into an aisle just as the firing started. Up to this point i had heard no words spoken. With the first lull in shooting, Kombozi came down the aisle toward me. He was wearing a full-length army coat. It was completely unbuttoned. As he came toward me he told me he was shot. i didn't believe him at first because i saw no blood and his weapon wasn't drawn. Then he insisted he was again, so i told him to lie down on the floor and ill take care of it.

Masai had apparently made it back out the door when the firing started, because just then he came back to the door and tried to draw the fire so We could get out. i saw him get shot in the face and stumble backwards out the door. i looked around for a way out, and realized there was none, and elected to play it low-keyed in order to try and get help for Kombozi as soon as possible. i was to learn that the effort was wasted. The manager of the store and his son, Paul Green Sr. and Jr., stomped Kombozi to death in front of my eyes.

Later, when i attempted to press counter-charges of murder against them, the Commonwealth Attorney called it "justifiable" homicide.

Five minutes after the shoot-out went down, the f.b.i. was on the scene and the next morning they held a press conference, saying i was notorious, dangerous, etc., and known to law enforcement agencies nationwide — and my bail was set at one million dollars on each count.